



SUMEI MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTS CENTER

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Project: Newark Chinatown Memorial Project -

Proposal for Newark Chinatown Memorial in the Mulberry Commons Park being constructed next to Edison's Ironside building.

Goal: A plaque or tablet giving information regarding the 3,000 Chinese who settled in Newark creating the first East Coast location with large numbers of Chinese immigrants and commerce. The site of the park currently being built adjacent to the Ironside Building is in the very heart of what was Newark Chinatown's business district, filled with restaurants, food and herb shops and homes as well. The area is well known as part of the original settlement of Newark in 1666; and by the time the Chinese arrived, many of the homes that still stood were the homesteads of the original settlers. The plaque should give a brief history of the area and include the Chinese who settled and lived there until the 1990's. Many of the Chinese organizations in New York are aware of their history here and will support this action. Support letters from many Chinese organizations are included in this proposal.

History: In 1870 Chinese men were brought to Belleville to work in a steam laundry there. The work was grueling and the racial situation between the superintendents and the Chinese was unpleasant enough that many Chinese finished their indentureship and moved into Newark. There they opened their own laundries and finally restaurants which added to Newark's popularity as a place for good Chinese food and great swing music. **The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943)** prevented Chinese men from bringing their wives and families to the US. Thus we have what became known as the "Bachelor Society". Chinese men cut off their long braids and donned western clothing and became "merchants". This allowed them to return to China. They were businessmen involved in trade. Others bought cheat books and used these to get "Paper Names" so they could immigrate.



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Because of racial discrimination, Chinese could not get jobs, and like African Americans, there were many places in which they were not allowed. By 1887, there were 47 hand laundries in Newark. Restaurants were just getting started. Chinese formed their own societies to help one another by lending money, connecting with relatives, and opening businesses. This did not mean they got along famously. Clans with different last names formed and fought against each other bringing from China past disagreements that led to what was called the "Tong Wars". As dangerous as these were they were invaluable to the survival of the immigrant Chinese population because they involved specific business laws/behaviors that had to be obeyed or perpetrators would be ousted or even killed.

A Remembrance: Whatever the future holds we should and must have a reminder of our past. Why? - Because it gives us a place to feel belonging, a place to feel kinship, a place to connect spiritually with those whose energy we pass on. Our children should never feel the void of emptiness that not knowing your past can give you.

A remembrance to the Chinese who settled in Newark and disappeared will remind us that no matter what situation occurs, it always comes to an end. But, it leaves an indelible signature, an energy force that should not be forgotten, but used to strengthen new individuals, give promise, hope, respect and love for those who will come after us. Regardless of our race or place of origin, we are really one being.

Request: We, Sumei, the Newark Chinatown Elders, and Chinese American Organizations request that the City of Newark include a remembrance monument to these Chinese Americans in the building of the Mulberry Commons Park.

We must come together to remember those who came before us to make the world a better place for us to live in.